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IBSEN'S *PEER GYNT* AND GOETHE'S *FAUST*.

That the great work of the great author of modern Norway presents more than chance analogies to the classic of modern Germany has not escaped notice. Both are dramatic poems in varied metre setting forth the career of an eminently national, but at the same time in only less degree universal figure. That the treatment of this figure is on the one hand synthetic and sympathetic, on the other analytic and relentless, has its inevitable basis in the widely differing natures of the two poets. In accordance with his deeply national tendency each author has drawn largely upon national legend and popular belief, not merely for his central character, but for much of his treatment as well. In these facts of general analogy there is however involved no necessary direct relationship between the two poems. Nor is it an easier matter here than elsewhere to demonstrate just how far Ibsen, who prided himself if ever author did upon "being himself" under all circumstances, may have fallen under Goethe's "influence", and just what the nature of his reaction to this influence as shown in his work was.

Doubtless the most striking and indubitable literary influence to be noted in Ibsen's life-work is found in his relation to that champion of the Norwegian woman's cause, Camilla Collett,¹ and the first manifestation of this relation is a peculiar but characteristic one. Camilla Collett's *Amtmandens Døtre* appeared in 1855. The thesis of this remarkable novel was that the type of "mariage de convenance" prevailing in a certain class of Norwegian society brought with it almost inevitably a sacrifice of woman's life-happiness. At the close of 1862 came Ibsen's *Kjærlighedens Komædie*, which deals satirically with love-matches on various stages of the way to matrimony and beyond and in a characteristically Ibsenesque dénouement places over against each other ideal love for love's sake which can find in the institution of marriage only its own destruction, and marriage for life-happiness, which had best be a marriage of reason. In this work Ibsen was not

¹ See Ibsen's admission, *Breve fra Henrik Ibsen*, II, 180 (Letter of 1889).

exactly contradicting Fru Collett, still less was he merely defending the "mariage de convenance"; he was putting the whole subject on a broader basis and introducing the element of absolute idealism, to which so much of his life-work and thought was devoted. In a spirit of conscious improvement upon the original that had so laid hold upon his mind he could not refrain from treating it to a bit of satire.²

The above relation is of great value in the way of an analogy for an understanding of the relation between Ibsen's shortly later work (1867) and its German prototype. That Ibsen actually knew Goethe's *Faust* when he wrote *Peer Gynt* and that it must have been vividly before his mind is sufficiently evidenced by a quotation from it.³ The circumstances of the quotation are of such a sort as to perhaps reveal something of the author's attitude toward Goethe's work. Peer Gynt under the spell of the entirely physical charms of the dirty Arab girl, Anitra, says in delight as he gives her the jewel she demands:

"Anitra! Evas naturlige datter!
Magnetisk jeg drages, thi jeg er mand,
og som der står hos en agtet forfatter:
'das ewig weibliche zieht uns an!'"

This last line contains the concluding words of the second part of *Faust* where they are from the lips of the "Chorus mysticus."⁴ That these profound words are quoted by the worthless Peer under such peculiarly vulgar circumstances might almost seem an affront offered the great German poet. Of course it must be borne in mind that it is only Peer who is quoting them and that he is in the habit of quoting as scripture and otherwise a deal of miscellaneous matter, still the "agtet forfatter" is not exactly in the vein of Peer's usual quotations and one is doubtless justified in seeking Ibsen's "self" be-

² Cf. G. Brandes, *Det moderne Gjennembruds Mænd*, 2nd ed. (1891), 129 ff. (first edition dates from 1883).

³ Cf. also his remarks on a Danish translation of *Faust*, *Breve*, II, 170, 185 (letters of 1888 and 1889); also J. Paulsen, *Samliv med Ibsen, Anden samling* (1913), 90, 170 ff.

⁴ The fact that Ibsen has "an" for "hinan" of the original shows that he was quoting from memory (or was he purposely misquoting?).

hind it.⁵ At the same time one should note that in a letter to Björnson dated December 28, 1867, i. e., in the next month after the appearance of *Peer Gynt*,⁶ Ibsen alludes twice to Goethe or his works. This is all the more remarkable as Ibsen was not at all in the habit of spicing his letters with literary allusions. In the first of these *Götz von Berlichingen* is cited as a type of real poetry as distinguished from mere allegory. In the second, advising Björnson to leave his own country, Ibsen expresses his conviction that in Goethe's time the people of Weimar probably formed his least appreciative public. Neither of these allusions savors in any way of a failure on the part of Ibsen to appreciate the poetic greatness of Goethe, and it is in fact not entirely the spirit of opposition to, still less that of contempt for *Faust* that we shall find in *Peer Gynt*, but rather again one of revision. This attitude applies particularly to the subject which through the most of his literary career lay near Ibsen's heart, the woman-question. At the close of *Faust* we are shown the spirit of the woman whose life Faust had ruined leading his soul to "higher spheres." At the close of Ibsen's poem *Peer Gynt*'s soul seems similarly to be saved through Solvejg's love (at least she herself is confident that such is the case, a confidence not necessarily shared by the reader nor actually confirmed by the author); but this outward similarity seems coupled with very essential difference in that *Peer Gynt* has done nothing whatever to deserve salvation. He appears the exact antithesis of the striving and aspiring Faust in that he has taken as guide of action and motto of life the going round about difficulties and being self-sufficient. Solvejg, who is first presented to us carrying a psalm-book as Margarete is just coming from confession is, unlike the latter, able by force of character and of purity to repel the advances of her beloved, though herself endowed with infinite devotion and in no respect deficient in the womanly graces and virtues.⁷

⁵ In *Kjærlighedens Komædie* (Ibsen's *Samlede Værker*, *Mindeudgave*, I, 327) the German poet is referred to as "geheimeråd Göthe"

⁶ *Breve fra Henrik Ibsen*, I, 164.

⁷ The similarity between Solvejg and Margarete is well brought out by A. Ehrhard, *Henrik Ibsen et le théâtre contemporain* (Paris, 1892),

This fundamental relationship between the two poems other points of connection, in some cases more conspicuous, merely serve to confirm. Of the five acts the first three correspond to the first part of *Faust*, the other two to the second. In the first act the scene at the peasant-wedding in its presentation of popular life and gayety suggests the one "Vor dem Thor;"⁸ in the second the scene with the three "sæter-jenter" corresponds in function with that in "Auerbachs Keller" (as forming a transition in its gross sensualism to the still grosser sensualism of the following) and those with the trolls in Dovre to the "Hexenküche" and "Walpurgisnacht."⁹ Apart from the general likeness in the troll and witch-scenes several more particular points of agreement may be noted. The troll-princess in green has as steed a large swine suggested perhaps by the steed of Baubo in "Walpurgisnacht."¹⁰ Among the troll-newspapers mentioned by the "Dovre-gubbe" at his reappearance in the fifth act is the "Blokksbergs-posten."¹¹ The really significant

165 f., the author noting further that each had a young sister of whom she was very fond and that Solvejg secures her information about Peer through his mother Aase, much as Margarete confided in Frau Marthe. This last point is of particular interest, as the contrast in character of the confidantes chosen by the two maidens serves to accentuate the point of difference in their own characters.

⁸ Ehrhard (158 ff.) noted the relation between this wedding and the one in Björnson's *Synnöve Solbakken* (1857) and concluded further that Ibsen was satirizing Björnson's work; cf. also J. Paulsen, *Samliv med Ibsen, Anden Samling*, 132.

⁹ The similarity of the troll-scenes to the "Hexenküche" and the "Walpurgisnacht" is noted by J. Collin, *Henrik Ibsen*, 307 (1910). Ibsen even introduces a "troidheks" with a ladle.

¹⁰ Cf. Collin, *Henrik Ibsen*, 302 (1910). Her green garb as in fact much of the setting of the troll-scenes Ibsen owes of course to Asbjørnsen's *Norske Huldre-Eventyr og Folkesagn* (1845-48). It is noteworthy however that in a list of witches' steeds found in this work (3rd ed., 1870, p. 116) the swine is not mentioned.

¹¹ This fact in itself is of no great importance as the Blocksberg is sufficiently well known in Scandinavia. It is in fact mentioned in the *Huldre-Eventyr* (p. 308), but in the form Bloksbjerg. The idea of the troll-newspapers was doubtless suggested to Ibsen by the third act of Heiberg's *En Sjæl efter Døden*, where Mefistofeles treats the soul to a considerable discussion of the newspapers of hell. This act which satirizes Denmark as hell had obviously influenced Ibsen in no small degree in his thrusts at Norway as the troll-kingdom.

correspondence lies in the fact that Faust was taken to the "Hexenküche" to secure the magic potion which was to rejuvenate him and prepare him for his career as a sensualist; while there he was treated to a mirrored vision of a wondrously beautiful woman and was informed by Mephistopheles after having drunk the potion that he would soon see Helen in every woman. The troll-king also has a means of transformation, a simple operation on the eye in this case,¹² which in addition to the tail and the other accessories will finally make Peer over into a genuine troll and cause him to see his troll-bride no longer as an ugly troll, but as a beautiful woman. Peer refuses to submit to the operation not because he particularly objects to becoming a troll, but because he doesn't like to enter into a state from which he can not withdraw again. The "Bøjjg" Ibsen has of course taken from the trolls of the *Huldre-Eventyr*, but the real significance he has given it as the power that bids Peer go round about and through which he is unable to force his way is not without relation to the "Erdegeist," which Faust conjures up only to have his intellectual aspirations dashed by the information that he cannot comprehend it. As Faust in his subsequent despair was about to take his own life, the Easter-song (introduced by the ringing of bells) saved him to the world. So Peer Gynt after his experience with the Bøjjg is saved from death only by the ringing of bells and psalm-singing.¹³ Ibsen lays emphasis on the fact that women (Solvejg and Peer's mother) are responsible for this bell-ringing. In both works the introduction of irrelevant contemporary satire is conspicuous in the troll and witch-scenes.¹⁴

In Ibsen's lengthy fourth act Peer Gynt after ripe experience

¹² The idea of this operation was suggested by Asbjørnsen; cf. Woerner, *Henrik Ibsen*, I, 233 f., where a convenient list of matter taken by Ibsen from Asbjørnsen (and Moe) is given.

¹³ The ringing of church-bells as a means of dispelling trolls was of course available from Asbjørnsen's *Huldre-Eventyr*, where it is mentioned several times, and Peer had been saved from the other trolls shortly before by means of it.

¹⁴ A "professortrold", "bispetrold", "folketrold" and "digtertrold" Ibsen left out in the poem as finally published (Cf. *Efterladte Skrifter*, II, 94 ff.)

is taken to the southward like Faust in the second part,¹⁵ and possibly as a whimsical counterpart to the latter's union with the restored Helen (marriage of the North with the South) we are treated to Peer's amour with the Arab girl Anitra. Faust was deeply imbued with a desire for knowledge, a desire dashed by his meeting with the "Erdgeist". Peer after his humiliating experience with Anitra decides to devote himself to the intellectual, to investigate the past, with which end in view he wanders about Egypt with a note-book, only to fall in with a German of the significant name of Begriffenfeldt, the head of an insane asylum in Cairo, who has himself just gone crazy, and who takes Peer back to the asylum where he is crowned as "kejser."¹⁶ As in the "Classische Walpurgisnacht" sphinxes among other creatures appear recalling the "Walpurgisnacht" of the North, so the Egyptian Sphinx and the column of Memnon recall to Peer the "Bøjjg" and his experiences with the trolls in the Dovrefjeld.¹⁷ Just before these Egyptian experiences a vision of Solvejg appears as had a vision of Gretchen to Faust in the "Walpurgisnacht," but what a contrast between the happy devoted Solvejg and the guilty Gretchen! It might seem far-fetched to connect the monkeys who in one scene molest Peer with the "Meerkater" and his family of the "Hexenküche," did not Ibsen himself expressly recall the troll-scene in the scene with the monkeys.¹⁸ As Faust finally found eager occupation in the restoration of

¹⁵ Somewhat further, it is true, to northern Africa. Greece does not however pass unmentioned, but that country Peer is inclined to avoid because of the war in progress there. Far from sympathizing with Greece he rather conceives the idea of loaning money to the stronger Turkey.

¹⁶ In connection with this relationship J. Collin (*Henrik Ibsen*, p. 324) speaks of Peer as "der neue Wagner." Peer's ambition to become "kejser" seems to have been suggested to Ibsen by Schack's *Phantasterne* (1857; cf. Woerner, *Henrik Ibsen*, I, 258 ff. Woerner, strangely enough, denies a direct influence), which may well also be responsible for the introduction of the insane asylum.

¹⁷ Cf. Collin, *op. cit.*, p. 324.

¹⁸ Collin (pp. 319 f.) compares an episode from Holberg's *Niels Klim*, which appears indeed to have given Ibsen the idea of the adjustable tail and its ornamentation with colored bow (cf. already Woerner, *Henrik Ibsen*, I, 391. 1900).

land from the sea by means of dikes and drainage Peer Gynt conceives temporarily the fantastic idea of letting the water of the ocean into the low parts of the Sahara and thus gaining land for cultivation and culture. That the last really suggested itself as a counterpart to the German feature is rather confirmed, if confirmation were necessary, by lines discarded by Ibsen in his published work,¹⁹ in which he speaks of the desert as "et Dødens Holland."

That in the fifth act the discussion as to the final disposition of Peer's soul stands in some relation to *Faust* has long since been noted. It may be said that in addition to the uncanny fellow-passenger, who is not the devil, and the fantastic button-moulder, who appears as a servant of the higher powers and whose occupation was suggested by circumstances of Peer's early life,²⁰ the devil himself is actually introduced, and much in the spirit of Goethe's Mephistopheles. There is considerable allusion to the horse's hoof as in *Faust*, and the devil appears in response to Peer's need of confession disguised as a pastor, as Mephistopheles among various disguises masqueraded on occasion for example as a teacher. For Ibsen's characterization of him as "den Magre" Collin²¹ has called attention to the agreement with Goethe's conception of Mephistopheles. The idea of moulding the soul over again as unfit for either heaven or hell shows *Faust* already modified by the Danish works Paludan-Müller's *Adam Homo* (1841-48) and Heiberg's *En Sjæl efter Døden* (1841), as is well known. The former of these is an epic dealing with a (from any ideal point of view) human failure, whose soul after death is placed on trial and finally led by that of Alma, a woman once loved by

¹⁹ *Efterladte Skrifter*, II, 104. That in Peer's idea of calling this land "Gyntiana" and transplanting the Norwegian race thither there is contained a satirical allusion to Ole Bull's colony "Oleana" in Pennsylvania (1852-57) has been noted; cf. *Efterladte Skrifter*, I, p. LXXII. 1909.

²⁰ Oehlenschläger's *Aladdin* (1805) apparently suggested the idea of moulding the soul over; cf. Collin, *Henrik Ibsen*, 338. Other features of *Peer Gynt* recalling this work make it probable that Ibsen in satirizing romanticism had it definitely in mind.

²¹ *Henrik Ibsen*, 341.

him but forsaken, through a temporary purgatory.²² The other is an "apocalyptic comedy" inspired in part at least by *Faust*. It deals in satirical vein with a soul that is turned out of heaven by St. Peter, of Elysium by Aristofanes; coming to hell it is instructed by Mefistofeles that hell-fire is only for sinners on a large scale, that for the great majority of humanity hell is simply a continuation of their philistine mundane existence.²³

The above details appear to justify the conclusions: (1) that Ibsen in writing *Peer Gynt* had Goethe's *Faust* very vividly before his mind; (2) that he was consciously bent upon improving the woman's rôle in Goethe's poem; (3) that among the many things satirized in Ibsen's work the *Faust* does not escape without its share. This satire is not at all of the nature of an attack upon the German poet, though one cannot exactly agree with Mauthner that the relation is one of "Pietät" toward Goethe,²⁴ nor is there any reason to re-

²² Ibsen's relation to Paludan-Müller is called by Ehrhard (p. 166) one of similarity in general inspiration which can hardly be explained as mere coincidence. Attention may be called to the fact that Adam recognizing Alma just before his death requests her to accuse him, to which she replies that he had been her joy through the many years, which is exactly duplicated at the close of *Peer Gynt* (cf. Woerner, *Henrik Ibsen*, I, 255-258 also 250. 1900). Both authors show similar fondness for bits from various languages, both making for example similar use of "Sic transit gloria mundi" (cf. Woerner *op. cit.* I, 391; see also in *Kjærlighedens Komædie* "Sic transit gloria amoris").

²³ The idea of a soul not being good enough for heaven nor bad enough for hell is of course no uncommon one (cf. Collin, *op. cit.* 338 f.) and has more recently found interesting expression for example in Kipling's *Tomlinson*. Brandes *Det moderne Gjennembruds Mænd*, 2nd ed., 86 f.) noted that it might have been suggested to Ibsen by Kierkegaard. One of the *Norske Folke-Eventyr* of Asbjørnsen and Moe (No. 21, 3rd ed., 1866, pp. 95 f.) tells of the smith who had difficulties in getting into either heaven or hell. This collection was used by Ibsen for *Peer Gynt* as well as were the *Huldrer-Eventyr* (cf. Woerner, *Henrik Ibsen*, I, 234.).

²⁴ *Eine Faustiade von Henrik Ibsen in Deutsches Montagsblatt*, 1881, No. 9. This article has been accessible to me only in the citations of Halvorsen's *Norsk Forfatter-lexikon* III, 49. 1889, giving its general tendency. No less than three other of Ibsen's works have been compared by German commentators with Goethe's *Faust*: Brand, *Kejser og Galikær* and *Når vi døde vågner*.

gard it as directed against Germany or the German people through the medium of its representative, Faust.²⁵ It seems rather inspired by flaws which Ibsen thought he detected in the character of Goethe's hero, flaws which he wished to make appear to correspond to the weaknesses of Peer Gynt: egotistical selfishness, the avoidance of personal responsibility and generally the lack of a sustained indomitable purpose, the failure to be a personality as Ibsen at that time conceived of personality.

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²⁵ In a letter of 1873 (*Breve*, I, 277 f.) Ibsen took occasion to protest against the accusation of having directed a poem against Germany. In 1871 he had been obliged to defend himself against a petty accusation of the sort appearing in a German periodical (cf. *Breve*, I, 329 f.; *Efterladte Skrifter*, I, 298 ff.). The satire of Germany or the Germans in "Von Eberkopf" is only parallel to that of England, France and Sweden; in "Begriffenfeldt" is satirized not Germany, but the Hegelian philosophy (cf. Collin, *op. cit.* 326 ff.).